Landing Craft Air Cushion (LCAC)

The Landing Craft Air Cushion (LCAC) is a high-speed, fully amphibious craft capable of carrying a 60-ton payload (75 tons in overload), at speeds in excess of 40 knots, at a nominal range of 200 nautical miles. The LCAC's ability to ride on a cushion of air allows it to operate directly from the well decks of amphibious warships and to access more than 70 percent of the world's beaches, compared with 17 percent for conventional landing craft.

A service life extension program (SLEP) began in late 2000 for the 74 active LCACs, which provides major refurbishment that will extend craft life to 30 years. Craft initially go through a system upgrade that includes the replacement of obsolete radios and radar, the installation of the Enhanced Position Location Reporting System, corrosion abatement, and upgrades of the current skirt system with an improved deep skirt. LCAC SLEP provides engine upgrades and refurbishes the hull, increasing the performance envelope. Phase II provides a Command, Control, Communications, Computers, and Navigation upgrade, which replaces these crafts' deteriorating and obsolete electronic suites.

An effort known as the Joint Maritime Assault Connector (JMAC) will be explored to assess the feasibility of a redesigned LCAC to carry up to two M1A1 tanks and to have greater range to support a seabase operating at 25 miles or more from the coast. The Research and Development (R&D) objective is to convert an LCAC into a heavy lift platform that can demonstrate and validate the feasibility of the heavy lift concept. This promising R&D effort has merit and deserves support in the FYDP.

The JMAC capability will take advantage of advanced technology, materials, and design that, when combined, will enhance the nation's ability to project expeditionary forces from the sea-based fleets of the future.